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AUTHOR Morton, Cecelia
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ABSTRACT

Literature reviews, focused on the relationship between child abuse and juvenile delinquency, indicate that juvenile delinquents are often products of families that consciously or unconsciously neglect their childhood needs. Corporal punishment by parents often leads to overt and aggressive misbehavior. Neglect and extreme punishment can cause children to become rebellious adolescents who use misbehavior to "pay back" the family. Data from several juvenile court case studies dealing with emotional disturbances and clinical investigations suggest a strong relationship between family socioeconomic status and delinquent behavior. (JAC)

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"WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE SAY ABOUT THE CORRELATION BETWEEN CHILD ABUSE AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY?"

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Cecelia Morton

THE CORRELATION OF CHILD ABUSE WITH JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for

C & I 397: Research in Education

Cecelia Morton

Questions of the Study

The study will attempt to provide answers to the following general questions:

1. What relationship, if any, does child abuse have with juvenile delinquency?
2. Is there a higher number of abused children among juvenile delinquents than non-abused children?
3. Do juveniles of lower socioeconomic status have a higher incidence of child abuse than juveniles from upper socioeconomic status?
4. Will child abuse be related to the knowledge of the causes of juvenile delinquency?

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this study is to determine the correlation between child abuse and juvenile delinquency.

SIGNIGICANCE OF THE STUDY

Most research investigating the relationship between child abuse and juvenile delinquency has been conclusive. Various studies to measure the number of abused children who are delinquents have resulted in a positive correlation. Researchers have noted that in the home of the delinquent there is often negative interpersonal relationships with family members. This often is a beginning of their role as a negative member of society becuase of the development of poor self-concept.

This study will add to the state of knowledge on the relationship of child abuse and juvenile delinquency. The information from this study would be of interest to social workers and community agencies.

Review of Related Literature

The relationship between child abuse and juvenile delinquency has been a recurrent controversial issue. Child abuse can be in the form of physical, psychological, sexual abuse, or neglect. According to Irwin (1979),

> The Child Welfare League of America defines an abused or neglected child not only as one who is physically injured but also as one who may be malnourished; without proper shelter or sleeping arrangements; ill and lacking essential medical care; sexually abused or exploited; denied normal experiences that would produce feelings of being loved, wanted, secure and worthy (emotional neglect); emotionally distrubed because of constant friction in the home; or exposed to unwholesome and demoralizing circumstances (p. 2).

The delinquent has been classified by Kvaraceus (1958) in three categories according to the pattern of disturbances within the syndrome of malbehavior. The emotionally disturbed and neurotic delinquent shows compulsive behavior in his delinquent actions and has conflicts and tensions which eventually cause overt-aggressive misconduct due to considerable anxiety and dependency. The socialized delinquent is one whose behavior is admired within his subculture or within his gang and this delinquent behavior is considered "smart" or "right" by the gang. The unsocialized delinquent habitually shows overt and aggressive misbehavior as a defense against persons who are regarded as hostile and threatening. He frequently acts alone. This type of delinquent needs to be treated in a security situation because he needs firm external controls. In addition to these subdivisions, Kvaraceus (1958)

states that other variants have also been identified; such as the delinquents who are "group-intoxicated type," those defending against trauma, mental deficiencies, and physical development problems. The delinquents that will be correlated are those defending themselves against the trauma of child abuse.

Child abuse involves the very safety of society because of its relationship to juvenile delinquency. Justice (1976) concluded that several studies have shown that violent criminals were abused as children. When a policewoman in the Child Abuse Unit of the Los Angeles Police Department did a follow-up study of children who had been rescued from abusive parents by police 18 years earlier, she discovered that more than half had acquired criminal records as juveniles and even a larger percentage had committed crimes as adults.

Sheild's (1962) stated that the heart of the problem of delinquency often lies within the actual traumatic experiences of the family. He says the delinquent may interpret himself in terms of an acute sense of injustice. The delinquent may feel rejected by the mother or through unconscious conflicts in the parents. The delinquent also may feel rejected or deprived when the parents are unable to meet the needs of a particularly oversensitive child; this gives reason why only one of many children in a family may become maladjusted. Rejection is a common form of psychological child abuse. Shulman (1961) also reported that several sets of findings throw light upon the constancy and inconstancy of the relationships of parents and children in the

same families, and upon the differential behavior responses of children to these differences in relationships. The first finding is that in families in which there is one delinquent child, not all others are delinquents. Healy (1936) has estimated that the incidence is about only 20 percent, of the families have more than one delinquent. It is signigicant that in the study last cited, Healy(1936) and Bronner (1936) found important differentials in emotional adjustment among the delinquents and nondelinquents in the same families. Among matched pairs, near in age and usually of the same sex, ninety-one percent of 105 delinquents were or had been very unhappy or discontented in their life circumstances, or extremely disturbed because emotion-provoking situations or experiences. Seven types of emotional disturbance were found to be: rejections (46 cases), thwarting (28 cases), inferiorities (46 cases), discomfort of parental disharmony (34 cases), sibling rivalries (31 cases), confusions arising in repressed mental conflicts (17 cases), and guilt feelings (9 cases). Other clinical investigators take the same general position as Healy(1936) and Bronner(1936) affirming that rarely does a child become delinquent where the family successfully maintained love and affection toward all of its members. A lack of love and attention can be considered a form of child abuse and "neglect".

Johnson(1979) further theorized that the frequency, seriousness, and even the basic patterns or types of delinquent behavior varies by social class position; with the lower socioeconomic parents

most frequently showing symptoms as child abusers. Johnson(1979) concludes that lower socioeconomic parents are plagued by unemployment, poverty, and survival problems, and often do not have the opportunity to satisfy their children's needs for self-esteem. To do so takes time, presence in the home, and some degree of freedom from pressing psychological burdens--all of which may be problematic for lower socioeconomic parent (who is also more likely than the earning-class parent to be a single female head of household). Briar(1965) and Piliavin(1965) also studied this problem and reported that lower-class children are more exposed to punishment, lack of love, and a general attitude of tension and aggression from early childhood. Kohn(1969) states that corporal punishment is very unlikely to develop self-esteem (and hence give the child a reason to invert himself or herself in the parental relationship). Also corporal punishment appears to be more prevalent in the lower socioeconomic than in middle socioeconomic families.

Johnson(1979) stated that his theory is not intended to predict which individuals would become involved in delinquency, but merely which sectors of society are most vulnerable to delinquency-producing influences. His subculture theory does imply, however, that deviant parents will produce delinquent offspring. Kvaraceus (1959) also agrees with this theory.

Ausubel in Adolescence (1978) believed that lower socioeconomic and middle socioeconomic delinquency has a common basis: parental alienation which can be interpreted as a form of psychological abuse. Lower socioeconomic delinquents are rejected children from

hostile homes. The lower socioeconomic delinquent group was found tc have significantly lower self-acceptance scores which suggested limited internal security and self-esteem. Middle socioeconomic delinquents come from homes in which psychological abuse takes place by the parents using the child to satisfy his own frustrated ambitions, to enhance his own ego, or as a source of "slave labor." When youngsters realize that they have been used they may resort to delinquency in an attempt to retaliate against the parents.

Welsh (1978) reports his findings regarding parental punishment practices and their connection to delinquency. Corporal punishment by aggressive parents can be administered to such a degree that it is considered physical abuse. Welsh (1978) cited specific cases of school children showing delinquent behavior that have had a history of aggressive parenting. A fourteen year-old boy, involved in setting fires in school, was found to have been beaten with the fists by his well-educated, professional father, who also battered his mother. A thirteen year-old girl who broke the finger of a policeman during a school riot told how her mother used to whip her with an extension cord until the mother was too exhausted to hit any more.

Schreiber (1978) compiled case studies of six child abused rapists to examine the self-perceptions of these men. She found evaluational, factual, and normative-cognitive related dimensions. Her study revealed an inter-subjected world in which the child abused rapists expressed a stressful and abusive home. They had difficulty expressing feelings, and a poor self-concept, and was sexually frustrated. They were involved in delinquency, alcoholism,

and/or drugs, and the rape victims were seen as targets for pent-up anger.

The following is a series of true social investigations of delinquents by the Department of Children and Family Services for the Juvenile Court of Cook County. Each case study briefly summarizes the facts that were gathered relating to the home and family, as well as the delinquents, to show how child abuse is present in each situation:

1. Case study of Sheryl Walker, 12 years of age, female, offense: Inhalence

   The case study (1979) states "Mr. Walker did not offer this information at first but indicated after some time to the police that the girl's natural father, according to his wife, did beat the child from the age of six months to two years of age. This is rather curious in that there have been allegations of child abuse made against Mr. Walker, the adoptive father. A report of child abuse was made out to the D. C. F. S. Hot Line in April, 1978. This referral was initiated by Mrs. Majors who is employed by the Department of Human Resources. Ms. Majors referred the case to the D. C. F. S. Hot Line at the request of the McDowell Elementary School. She indicated to the police that at the time she made the referral there was a burn on Sheryl's leg and also bruises on the neck and body. Mr. Jones, the principal of McDowell Elementary School indicated that he and his staff suspected that there was some child abuse involved (p.3).

2. Case study of Marsha Boyd, 14 years of age, female, offense: Runaway/Drugs.

   The case study (1980) states "Marsha has been previously active with the court. She was first referred to the court-charged with Runaway; she was placed on six months, 4-7 supervision. Marsha was referred to the court a second time on a neglect petition. Marsha alleged that her father had sexually abused her. The neglect petition had indicated that the minor's environment is injurious to the minor's welfare. Also, the minor is dependent in that the minor is without proper care due to mental disabilities of the father. Temporary custody was given to

D. C. F. S.; six months later the child was returned to her father's household. Marsha was referred to the Juvenile Court a third time, charged with Runaway, six months later. Two weeks later, Marsha was referred to the court for a fourth time on a delinquency petition, alleging Possession of Cannabis (P. 3)." Marsha's older borther, David also physically abused her. Marsha mentioned this as a factor as to why she continues to run away. This physical abuse was verified by the father's girlfriend, Catherine Carlson. The father also mentioned that Marsha and the older brother did not get along well, stating that the brother beats her up, that's why the child ran away recently. This case study shows that abuse can be applied by other family members besides the parents.

3. Case study of Carl Halls, 16 year-old male, offense: Battery/Assault.

The case study (1980) states that Carl, a resident of the Ulysesee Children's Home, came at the house parent, Tina Moore with a broken pool cue when she tried to break up a fight between Carl and another juvenile resident of the home. Although the alcoholic father died in 1974, the report (1980) states that "Mother indicated that Mr. Halls was extremely abusive to her and the children when he was in the home, and stated that for the most part the children feared their father (p.5-6)." "It is obvious that Carl Halls is an extremely disturbed boy. Reports from Riverview Hospital from both psychiatric and psychological reports state the diagnostic impression to be organic brain syndrome, non-psychotic associated with explosive personality. In summary of these reports this condition seems to be the result of a lack of nurturing and also extremely chaotic home situation throughout Carl's life time (P.8)." Negligence is a form of child abuse.

Brenkinridge and Abbott (1912) studied how the court viewed "delinquent" families several years ago; their conclusions are still relevant today. They said the juvenile court cannot work miracles; it must be aided by the full cooperation of the community to remove the conditions which are feeding thousands of delinquent children into the courts every year. The community

must work towards finding the causes of delinquency and abolish them. One may hope that new methods of conservation will be devised to take the place of the old waste of child life. By such means good, wholesome citizens will develop; capable of leading positive and constructive lives. When society has helped build the lives of the neglected children, the little strangers, the orphans, the degraded, poor and ignorant ones, who have passed in and out before the judge; greater wisdom and understanding have been acquired.

The sited studies show that there is a relationship between child abuse and juvenile delinquency. The juvenile delinquent is often a product of a family that either unconsciously neglects his childhood needs or is too involved in their own personal and/or financial problems to give him what he needs. Corporal punishment administered by parents often leads to overt and aggressive misbehavior. Neglect and extreme punishment can cause the child to become a rebellious adolescent who uses negative behavior, consciously or unconsciously to "pay back" the family.

The problem between the relationship of child abuse and juvenile delinquency will continue. Continuous research is needed to evaluate the effect of physical and/or psychological abuse in the parent/child relationship and to relate these variables to measure their effect on juvenile delinquency.

Hypotheses

Research:

There will be a relationship between child abuse as determined by the number of official reports of physical, psychological and/or sexual abuse and juvenile delinquency.

Operational:

There will be a correlation between child abuse as determined by the number of official reports of physical, psychological, and/or sexual abuse and the criminal records of juvenile delinquents.

Null:

There will be no significant relationship between child abuse as determined by the number of official reports of physical, psychological, and/or sexual abuse and the criminal records of juvenile delinquents.

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